

Preparing Students to be Montana Ready

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As Montana's state superintendent of public schools, I have the opportunity to interact with students in classrooms big and small across our diverse state. I have seen first-hand that Montana's students reflect the unique diversity of our state's geography, our people, and our economy. The ways in which we prepare future generations to be Montana ready must reflect this.

The Montana Department of Labor and Industry [projects](#) that over 5,000 jobs will be created in Montana each year through 2025, with many of them concentrated in construction, manufacturing, and healthcare. These are not only in-demand careers with competitive salaries, but they also require specialized skillsets of which there is a shortage in Montana.

Public education, both K-12 and higher education, must mirror the dynamic nature of Montana's economy. Education cannot be a one-size-fits-all system. I have been working with private sector leaders to bring industry into classrooms and classrooms out to industries as part of my Montana Ready initiative. Students must be made aware as early as middle school that there is no single pathway to career success.

To Montana's class of 2018, I encourage you to celebrate your graduation from high school as only the beginning of your continued path of learning. Pathways to Montana readiness include college, the military, apprenticeships, technical degrees, two-year degrees, certifications, and any combination of these. By looking at the true needs of our ever-changing economy and where your individual potential lies within it, you will find happiness and career success. Montana's big sky is the limit!

To students returning to school next year, I would challenge you to engage in some form of individualized learning that is outside of the traditional school box. You have access to a world of courses through the Montana Digital Academy and dual enrollment programs with our colleges and universities. You can also approach local businesses and work with your school administrators to get credit for internships or work-based learning. Take advantage of these unique opportunities. Most importantly, as I always used to tell my students, please enjoy our Montana summer and come back safely to school in the fall!

Elsie Arntzen
State Superintendent